

## Nantucket Sound

Charles Shirō Inouye

1

The day is overcast.  
Our boat drenched with dew.

We shove off  
and glide with the current,  
slowly away from Viking Rock,  
where Leif Erikson  
once ran aground.

An osprey nest  
at the first bend.  
Clams thick in the sandbars.

beads of dew vanish  
in the first morning breeze—  
an egret on shore

2

Our boat,  
the *Mono no aware*,<sup>1</sup>  
passes by ships moored  
to the left and right.

We try not to leave a wake,  
no regrets  
no frustrations.  
Yet I turn and say,  
“I haven’t gotten over  
the people I’ve lost.”

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1. The “sadness of things,” ものの哀れ.

I still remember  
my mother's last breath.  
And the one that came after.

dry desert blossoms—  
an apple tree bends above  
the poppy garden

a frost-covered lawn—  
I sit on the couch where she  
decided to die

3

We covered her body  
with a white sheet,  
but drew it back  
to remove the rings  
from her fingers.

Covering her again,  
my arms remembered  
a familiar motion.

Eat.

Drink.

This is my blood  
and my body.

4

From the mouth of the river,  
full throttle on the open sea.

Three miles out,  
we reach the tire reef where,  
thirty feet below,

schools of  
scup and bass gather.

keep the line taut—  
I bounce the lead weight on the  
rocks and sand below

wait for the bite—  
I lift the rod tip high to  
set the hook

5

On my fingers  
the saltwater feels slippery,  
a diluted runoff of  
blood and tears.

black-winged terns  
skim above the flowing tide—  
sand eels in the surf

In this cicada-shell world,  
there is no catch and release.  
Only the slashing knife  
and bleeding out  
in the live well.

*Sashimi* scup  
and chunks of bass  
fried in hot oil.

Seeking.

Finding.

Crying.

*Meoggo sanda* (먹고 산다).

“I eat and live.”

6

Our faces burn  
with the bright wind that  
thinly spreads over the water.  
A brilliant *ma*—  
a breath of tide and sand,  
a holy interval in the catching  
and killing.

Pulled  
into the rip off Popponeset,  
sliced open against  
the edge  
of the moon,  
our boat trembles  
in the flow,  
a lobster buoy  
severed from its trap  
floats unattached.

seagulls circle and scream—  
the wave that came through last  
year is here again

The ancient  
current  
returns  
and waits  
for the day  
I walk  
on water.

Surely, that day  
will come.  
But not now.

And maybe  
not tomorrow.

7

I know the dead  
are not dead.  
And that this pause  
is for my good.

Yet I feel joy  
in the wind and waves,  
even as I hear  
the shoals  
call from below.

8

The breeze picks up,  
the waves tip white.  
We reel in our hooks  
and point north to shore.  
  
Through the white water,  
beyond the sharks  
and the seals,  
past the cormorants  
and children on the beach,  
upriver through the nervous water  
of a thousand peanut bunker  
swimming for their lives,  
there waits  
someone  
to tie us tight.

9

Dear God in Heaven,  
I fear you've made a world  
too beautiful  
for me to understand.

Were it not for  
darkness and pain,  
would I ever know  
the smallest truth  
about anything?

10

On the dock  
my knife  
cleans the catch.  
Sharp steel  
tight against the bone.

For my wife,  
flounder livers  
in vinegar.  
For my son,  
fish and chips.  
For the crabs in the river,  
heads, skeletons, and innards.

At my side  
you ask,  
"Do you have any meat?"

sea snails trailing—  
rosehips fragrantly shade the  
oysters along shore

Someday soon,  
We will eat fish  
over your fire.

But for now  
please leave me here  
below the line.

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